



City of Rockville

MEMORANDUM

December 11, 2003

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Jim Wasilak, Chief of Long Range Planning

SUBJECT: Draft East Rockville Neighborhood Plan

The purpose of this session is for the Planning Commission to review and take action on the proposed text and map changes to the draft East Rockville Neighborhood Plan. The changes are intended to address the public hearing issues that were raised, as well as others that have arisen during the subsequent discussion. By Article 66B of the State Code, the Planning Commission is required to approve a Resolution (Attachment 1), which in turn will approve the Plan with the changes detailed in the draft Addendum and Errata sheet (Attachment 2). This functions as the Commission's recommendation to the Mayor and Council, which retains adoption authority for Master Plans. The following is a brief summary of the issues and the response to each.

Stonestreet Redevelopment and Zoning

The draft East Rockville Plan recommends zoning changes in the Stonestreet corridor as a catalyst for redevelopment and gradual change in the corridor's industrial properties. Although the draft Plan did not recommend zoning changes that would negatively impact existing businesses immediately, it does establish a vision and framework for the service industrial corridor to transition into a mixed-use area with shops, residences and offices. It should be noted that rezoning to a different zone with different uses and development standards would not have meant that businesses would have had to close or relocate upon rezoning. Businesses are protected by the nonconforming use provisions in the Zoning Ordinance, which allows previously existing legal uses to continue operations even though the use may no longer be permitted in the new zone.

In order to work through the important issue of allowing existing businesses to continue operating in the corridor when new zoning is implemented, the East Rockville Neighborhood Plan Advisory Group (ERNPAG) and the newly-formed East Rockville Business Association (ERBA) met several times to discuss this and other issues. The direction that was agreed upon was that the Plan should allow for existing businesses to continue operating, while also allowing property owners to redevelop per the recommendations in the Plan for mixed-use, Main Street-style development. The Plan clearly articulates the intent of the future zoning provisions in the

Plan was most important, accompanied by a recommendation for the creation of a new zone (TCE, Town Center East) that can be written specifically for the conditions of and desires for the Stonestreet corridor. The details of permitted uses, potential grandfathering, development standards and how the zone is ultimately implemented in the corridor are to be delineated as part of the Implementation Strategies Study that will be undertaken following the adoption of the Plan.

The implications are that the transition to new uses and forms of development will be more gradual over time, with new uses and buildings co-existing with established uses and structures. For property owners and businesses not wanting to redevelop, this allows them to continue as permitted uses (provided they are included in the new use list), while allowing those who wish to do redevelop their property an opportunity to do so. Although ERBA correspondence indicates a preference for the implementation for a floating zone, this option likely would not achieve the objectives of the Neighborhood Plan. Because of how floating zones are defined, the change in zone from the I-1 to the TCE would take place at the option of property owners, potentially resulting in I-1 zoned properties remaining so for a long period of time. This potentially could result in redevelopment under the I-1 zone, which is clearly not desired. Any redevelopment should occur under the new standards of the TCE zone and its grandfathering provisions as suggested in the Plan.

Although most of the property currently in the I-1 Zone would likely be rezoned to the new TCE Zone, certain properties at the southeast corner of Howard Avenue and North Stonestreet Avenue had been recommended to be rezoned to the R-60 Zone in order to permit redevelopment of those properties as single family homes compatible with the residential character on the remainder of Howard Avenue. These four properties, containing 2.7 acres, contain a mix of office and service industrial uses currently. Although the existing uses would be grandfathered under the recommendations from the Plan, the likelihood or desirability of redevelopment as single-family homes is limited. Evaluation of this proposal resulted in a revised recommendation for these parcels which achieves the objectives of the original recommendation but which also provide some protection for the existing businesses and property owners' investments. The two parcels that front on North Stonestreet Avenue are recommended for the new TCE Zone, while the two parcels that front on Howard Avenue are recommended for the R-60 Zone, but with supporting Plan text for townhouses, rather than single-family homes, on the properties. This would probably be implemented through the Residential Townhouse (RTH) Special Development Procedure. A landscaped buffer would be required to be provided between the new residential units and the existing neighborhood. In conjunction with this change in land use and zoning recommendations, the TCE portion of the MCPS property could also be designated as the preferred location for the Science Complex.

Other Public Hearing Issues

Although most of the public hearing issues were related to Stonestreet redevelopment, there were several that related to other areas. Transportation issues included the feasibility of a traffic circle at Baltimore Road and South Stonestreet Avenue, limitations on parking at Metro, potential

sidewalks in the Rockdale subdivision and removal of a “no turn on red” sign when exiting the Metro at South Stonestreet Avenue. No text changes are recommended to the text for the circle, limitations on parking and the no turn signs. The limitations and signs were specifically recommended to address concerns about pedestrian safety and cut-through traffic expressed by neighborhoods. Additional text is recommended to clarify that sidewalk would not be installed where right-of-way is insufficient, and that alternatives could be considered to conventional sidewalks in these instances.

The text regarding the three retail uses in the neighborhood - Maryvale Market, the Maryvale Center and the Stonestreet Convenience Store – has been revised to reflect the true intent of the Advisory Group’s discussions. The draft Plan recommends elimination of alcoholic beverage sales from all three of these uses via available means.

Other text changes include:

- The addition of a photo of the Croydon Park pumphouse, and further recommended support for historic designation for the building.
- Text added to ensure that there is a generous setback and attractive setting in the vicinity of the proposed traffic circle, which is a primary gateway to East Rockville.

Stonestreet Realignment and Reconfiguration

The draft Plan recommends that Stonestreet Avenue become a boulevard, with landscaped center median, wide sidewalks, on-street parking and one travelway in each direction. North Stonestreet Avenue is within a right-of-way of variable width, but averages 60 feet. As recommended in the Plan, the new right-of-way would need to be approximately 86 feet to accommodate the desired cross-section. This assumes 20 feet of pedestrian and planting zone on either side of the roadway, as well a median of ten feet. Obviously, this new configuration would require additional right-of-way. What typically occurs in these situations is that once a roadway section is identified through a Master Plan, redevelopment on abutting properties will trigger the requirement for right-of-way dedication. Also typical in road widening is the use of eminent domain to acquire the needed width.

In addition, the roadway as conceived would need to be realigned near its intersection with Park Road to accommodate its connection with the proposed traffic circle and South Stonestreet Avenue. The conceptual alignment in the Plan indicates property impacts on the east side of the existing North Stonestreet Avenue, between Woodland Road and Park Road. This allows for the two intersecting segments of Stonestreet Avenue to be resolved in the traffic circle. To address business and property owner concerns about property impacts, the addendum and errata sheet included language that the alignment shown is conceptual, and subject to a realignment study as well as final design and engineering. Should the right-of-way be relocated, the existing right-of-way would likely be abandoned and potentially added to remaining properties, providing that public street access would be retained. Because the street upgrade and realignment are closely

linked to redevelopment, a key component of the Implementation Strategy Study will be not only final design and engineering inputs, but how and when to accomplish the upgrade.

Potential Parkland Designation

The draft Addendum and Errata Sheet suggests a potential park site on Crabb Avenue, just east of the current industrial area. This property, at 114 Crabb Avenue, consists of 1.72 acres that is subdivided into five lots that date from the original England's Second Addition to Rockville subdivision. All five lots are owned by the same owner, who has been made aware of the potential designation and expressed that they have no desire to have the parkland designation on their property.

Implementation Strategy Study

The draft Addendum and Errata Sheet recommends completion of an Implementation Strategy Study, with specific components including:

- Market analysis to provide input to decision-making for uses and development standards in the corridor;
- Zoning details and potential financial and economic incentives analysis to determine the appropriate mechanism to encourage redevelopment as well as protect existing businesses; and
- Roadway Alignment and Public Improvements study.

This Study will be an essential component of the neighborhood Plan, in that it will determine how the Plan's vision comes to fruition. As previously noted, this Study has already been funded in the City's Capital Improvements Program (CIP). This study is an opportunity to engage experts in redevelopment, market analysis and economics as well as transportation engineering, to define in one package how the Plan will be implemented. While this is a different strategy than has been employed in previous Plans, it is not particularly unusual in situations where redevelopment is expected. The development of the Implementation Strategy study will be a public process, involving the affected stakeholders, but with more of a technical component than the Neighborhood Plan itself, which has been an opportunity for a neighborhood to express its vision.

Map Updates and Corrections

The Plan's Proposed Land Use, Preliminary Zoning and Illustrative Maps have been reviewed for consistency and have incorporated suggested changes. New versions of those three maps are included as Attachment 5. Changes to the Plan's Proposed Land Use Map include:

- Public park and open space shown at the Stonestreet/Park traffic circle. This designation has been removed and replaced with the "Mixed Use Development" designation.

- Designation of the two properties at the southwest corner of Howard Avenue and North Stonestreet Avenue as “Mixed Use Development”; designation of 309 and 315 Howard Avenue as “Attached Residential”; Designation of MCPS property opposite Howard Avenue as “Science Center”. The Preliminary Zoning Map has been changed accordingly.

Correspondence

After the Commission’s November 5 meeting, letters were sent to all property owners, businesses, and individuals in the public hearing record, informing them of the reopening of the public record and the date of the December 3 worksession. At the Commission’s request, letters were sent via certified, return receipt requested mail to all property owners informing them of potential zoning changes for their property (See Attachment 4).

Additional letters have been received in response to the reopening of the public record (See Attachment 3).

Attachments

1. Draft Resolution
2. Draft Addendum and Errata Sheet
3. Public Comment received
4. Letter to Stonestreet property owners
5. Revised Land Use and Zoning Maps

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